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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 002814

SIPDIS

STATE FOR S/CT (JREAP), L, IO, EB, INL, AND NP
STATE FOR WHA, WHA/USOAS, AND WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HONDURAS: 2003 ANNUAL TERRORISM REPORT

REF: STATE 301352

1. The 2003 Annual Terrorism Report for Honduras follows.
Points are keyed to refel paragraph headings:

A. Significant Actions by GOH

In 2003, President Ricardo Maduro continued his policy of strong Honduran support for U.S. efforts against terrorism, was a member of the Coalition of the Willing for Iraq, and sent 370 troops to Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The GOH also ratified three outstanding counterterrorism (CT) conventions during the year. The GOH promptly issued freeze orders for terrorist-related assets at U.S. request. No terrorist assets have been found in Honduran financial institutions, to date. However, the GOH has yet to designate a national coordinator for counterterrorism. The GOH has been an advocate in the region for U.S. anti-terrorism goals and supported the United States in regional fora, in the United Nations and in the Honduran media with forthright and unambiguous public statements against terror. The Government of Honduras (GOH) continues to provide increased security around the U.S. Embassy and other USG facilities.

After September 11, 2001, Honduras took the lead, in its role as President Pro-Tempore of the Central American Integration System (SICA), in organizing Central American cooperation in the war against terrorism. The GOH convoked Central American heads of state for a terrorism summit on September 19, 2001. The Summit produced an endorsement of President Bush's call for an international coalition against terrorism, a firm condemnation of all terrorist acts, and full support for United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and Organization of American States (OAS)/Rio Treaty actions. In February 2002, the Congress passed and President Maduro signed legislation to strengthen the Honduran anti-money laundering regime, in accordance with UN conventions. The GOH responded significantly to all U.S. requests for intelligence cooperation. The GOH took immediate measures to implement new U.S. civil aviation security regulations, and continues to work with the Transportation Security Administration on such measures.

The GOH has tightened visa restrictions by adding countries to its list of countries that require Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) approval prior to visa issuance, coordinated the Central American SICA regional counterterrorism plan, and began developing its own national counterterrorism plan.

Since September 11, 2001, the GOH has signed and ratified the Convention on the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism Crimes in November 2002, acceded to the Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings in November 2002, and signed the OAS Convention to Prevent and Punish Acts of Terrorism in June 2002. In 2003, the GOH ratified three more pending counterterrorism (CT) conventions, the 1980 Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, the 1988 Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts of Violence at Airports Serving International Civil Aviation, and the 1991 Convention on the Marking of Plastic Explosives for the Purpose of Detection (signed by the GOH March 26, 1991), which makes the GOH a party to 10 international CT conventions. The GOH still needs to sign and ratify two outstanding International Maritime Organization conventions/protocols and ratify two OAS conventions (1971 and 2002) against terrorism.

B. Response of the Judicial System

The weakness of the rule of law in Honduras continues to be the most serious impediment to any prospective government prosecution, extradition, or investigation of suspected terrorist activity. Historically, the judicial system has not played a significant role in dealing with terrorism. Heavy caseloads, severe resource constraints, insufficient personnel and lack of expertise in handling complex international investigations limit the ability of the judicial and law enforcement authorities to deter terrorists from operating in Honduras. Moreover, the judicial system remains vulnerable to political tampering, corruption, and improper, extra-legal influence.

There were no terrorist incidents thwarted or terrorist cells broken up in Honduras in 2003. There were no cases of terrorism, domestic or international, before the Honduran judicial system during 2003.

On May 14, a group calling itself the "Popular Revolutionary Forces" issued a communique announcing the beginning of a campaign to overthrow the Maduro government and vowed to evict "Yankees" and other foreign occupiers. The communique also identified diplomats from the United States, United Kingdom, and Spain as legitimate military targets. Initial assessment by both the Embassy and the Honduran police concurred that the communique was an attempt to gain political support and therefore not considered a realistic threat.

1C. Extradition of Suspected Terrorists

The GOH did not request the extradition of any suspected terrorist. The U.S. has not asked the GOH to extradite anyone suspected of terrorism in 2003. There are no third country extradition requests for suspected terrorists.

1D. Impediments to Prosecution/Extradition

The Honduran Constitution (Article 102) prohibits the extradition of Honduran nationals. The U.S.-Honduras Extradition Treaty of 1928 permits each party to refuse to extradite its own citizens. In July 2000, Honduras ratified a revised extradition treaty with Spain that enumerates various acts of terrorism that cannot be considered political crimes. The GOH will not extradite anyone for a crime punishable by death, unless the requesting country provides formal assurances that the individual will receive a lesser penalty if convicted (the maximum sentence for any one crime in Honduras is 20 years imprisonment). There are no other legal impediments to Honduras's ability to prosecute or extradite suspected terrorists.

1E. Responses Other Than Prosecution

Honduras belongs to Interpol and shares criminal information with other countries, but has had difficulty preparing basic Interpol "red notices" and provisional arrest requests. As noted above, it is sharing intelligence information with the U.S. and its Central American neighbors. The GOH has been an advocate in the region for U.S. anti-terrorism goals and has supported the United States in regional fora, in the United Nations and in the Honduran media with forthright and unambiguous public statements against terror.

There is growing evidence of the existence of an illicit trade of "arms for drugs" utilizing illegal narcotics that transit through Honduras (see answer G). In July 2003, the GOH passed Article 332 of the Honduran Penal Code making the possession of AK-47s and other types of automatic weapons illegal. A 90-day arms-for-money program was initiated to facilitate the collection and destruction of weapons deemed illegal. The GOH's severely limited capacity to interdict drugs and the alleged involvement of current and former military/police officials, who may retain access to arms caches left over from the 1980's Central American conflicts, undermine efforts to disrupt these transactions.

In addition, there is little or no security at the country's three principal ports on the Caribbean coast, Puerto Cortes, La Ceiba, and Trujillo. However, the GOH launched an expedited effort to meet new International Maritime Organization and U.S. port security standards.

1F. Major Counterterrorism Efforts

Honduras strongly opposes international terrorism in international fora. President Maduro and his cabinet consistently and vigorously spoke out in support of U.S. and international anti-terrorism efforts in statements to the Honduran media.

1G. Support for International Terrorism

The GOH provides no support to international terrorism, terrorists, or terrorist groups. There are no known terrorist elements operating in Honduran territory. The GOH does not permit sanctuary, training sites, training or storage/transfer of weapons to terrorists groups.

However, there is growing evidence of the existence of an illicit trade of "arms for drugs" utilizing illegal narcotics that transit through Honduras. The arms from these deals are presumably destined for use by terrorist groups in Colombia. The GOH's severely limited capacity to interdict drugs and

the alleged involvement of current and former military/police officials, who may retain access to arms caches left over from the 1980's Central American conflicts, undermine efforts to disrupt these transactions.

Honduras has maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba since late January 2002, but has not named an ambassador, even though Cuba has an ambassador in Honduras. Honduras has no diplomatic relations with the other state sponsors of terrorism -- Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria.

H. Public Statements in Support of Terrorist-Supporting Countries on a Terrorism Issue

The GOH has not voiced support for terrorist groups or their objectives, or for state sponsors of terrorism.

I. Changes in Attitude toward Terrorism

Immediately following the September 11, 2001 attacks, Honduran police and military authorities began working even more closely with U.S. Mission counterparts to assess links to international terrorism in Honduras. This cooperation has continued under President Maduro in 2002-2003. Extensive investigation and ongoing threat analysis has not revealed any terrorist links in Honduras. Honduran financial officials and its private sector banking association responded promptly to UNSC and U.S. requests related to the freezing and seizing of terrorist financial assets and accounts. The GOH continues to issue freeze orders of accounts of terrorist individuals and groups listed in the U.S. Executive Order, and the financial community has fully cooperated. To date, no terrorist accounts have been found.

On May 14, a group calling itself the "Popular Revolutionary Forces" issued a communique announcing the beginning of a campaign to overthrow the Maduro government and vowed to evict "Yankees" and other foreign occupiers. The communique also identified diplomats from the United States, United Kingdom, and Spain as legitimate military targets. There was no further action by the "Popular Revolutionary Forces" or evidence that this group represented a realistic threat at this time.

Palmer